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ABSTRACT

Contrary to public expectations, this study hypothesized that viewers of the television film, "The Day After," would have less intention to stop nuclear warfare after they watched it because the film would generate fear without providing a clear way for viewers to eliminate the threat of nuclear war. Questionnaires assessed whether viewers and nonviewers of the film would differ in their attitudes about nuclear war and how to deal with the possibility of nuclear war. Sixty-three undergraduates were given pretests and posttests of questionnaires, using semantic differential, Likert, and Rotter's locus of control items. In addition, questionnaires were given to 316 students who had not seen the film. Results indicated that viewers generally felt more negative about nuclear weapons after the movie than before. While viewers of the film did not become more pro-nuclear warfare over time, non-viewers did become more favorable toward nuclear warfare. A possible explanation is that programming and discussion associated with the movie led nonviewers to increase their thinking about nuclear war, even without seeing the movie, and that this thinking was less negative than thoughts generated by those who had seen the movie. While most data from other quasi-experimental studies of this film's effect do not show similar results, data from studies by Schofield and Pavelchek (1984) and Mayton (1984) seem to lend support to the results of this study. (IS)

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When Imagination Defies Television: The Day After Effect

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A. Title: When Imagination Defies Television: The Day After Effect

B. Area: Attitudes, Attitude Change

C. Problem: Contrary to public expectation, we hypothesized that the television movie "The Day After" would lead viewers to have less intention to stop nuclear war than before they watched it. "The Day After" was hypothesized to constitute a fear appeal lacking any clear method for removing the fearful condition, nuclear war. Based on Rogers's (1975; Rogers and Mewborn, 1976) fear-appeals research, because the movie lacked clear, achievable suggestions for averting war, viewers should adopt a position of defensive avoidance. Defensive avoidance involves returning to your original attitude (plus not intending to perform behavior consistent with the target attitude) when the persuasive message portends doom, without indicating how to avert this doom.

D. Procedure: Questionnaires composed of semantic differential, Likert and Rotter's Locus of Control items assessed if viewers and nonviewers of "The Day After" differed in their attitudes about nuclear war and weapons, fear about nuclear war, feelings of control regarding nuclear war and intentions to actively avert nuclear war. Sixty-three undergraduates were given both pretests and posttests and 316 were given posttests only. Questionnaires were filled out in class in 10-15 minutes approximately one week before and after the movie and were analyzed using mixed-model ANOVAs.

E. Results: A main effect indicated that subjects felt more negative about nuclear weapons, generally, after the movie than before ($F(1,53) = 10.14$, $p = .003$. Two significant time (before-after) X television (viewers-nonviewers) interaction (arming other countries and avoidability

of nuclear war) and three trends toward interaction (fear of war, arming the U.S. and U.S.S.R.) indicated (along with post hoc analyses) that nonviewers became more pro-nuclear war over time, while viewers did not (see Table 1). No other effects reached significance.

7. Conclusions: Apparently the movie was not sufficiently fear-arousing to cause defensive avoidance. However, on several measures subjects who had not seen the movie shifted their attitudes toward a pro-nuclear position, while movie viewers did not. We speculate that programming and discussion associated with the movie led nonviewers to increase their thinking about nuclear war, even in the absence of the movie, and that this thinking was less negative than thoughts generated by those watching the movie. The differential thinking may have led to the surprising pattern of attitude data. We call this unusual result the "Day After Effect." The full results cannot easily be understood using the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, in press) which posits that under conditions of high personal involvement and sufficient cognitive ability, people's attitudes are based on cognitive responses to the topic and/or content of a persuasive message. It might also be understood by social comparison theory or perhaps some other theoretical explanation.

Stuart Oskamp (of the Claremont Graduate School) reviewed 10 studies on the movie that were presented at APA last year. Six of these were quasi-experiments, similar to ours. In general, the results seem not to support our Day After Effect. However, some data from those studies do.

Although not discussed in text this way, two tables in a paper by Schofield and Pavelchak seem consistent with the Day After Effect, as

does a table in Daniel Mayton's APA paper. For example, Mayton suggested in text that viewers became significantly less supportive of first strike policies after the film. However, our reading of the table of data on which this comment was based suggested a different interpretation. Change scores for nonviewers were larger and in the opposite direction of those for viewers, suggesting not only that viewers became more anti-war over time, but that even more strongly, nonviewers became less anti-war over time, consistent with our Day After Effect. No other change scores of Mayton's reached statistical significance.

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Table 1

Means and F values for significant two-way interactions and trends of time (before the movie or after) X television (viewer or nonviewer).

				Before		After	
Variable	df	F	p	Viewer	Nonviewer	Viewer	Nonviewer
Avoid	1,52	5.08	.03	5.9	6.6	5.9	5.2
Fear	1,53	3.23	.08	2.8	1.4	3.1	3.2
USArm	1,53	3.37	.08	3.0	3.3	2.5	3.8
USSRArm	1,53	3.08	.09	1.9	1.3	1.9	2.3
OtherArm	1,53	5.38	.03	3.5	5.2	2.9	6.2

Note. All scales range from 0 to 9, with smaller numbers denoting anti-nuclear war positions, except with Avoid, where smaller numbers indicate greater inevitability of nuclear war. Avoid = Do you believe anything can be done to avoid nuclear war? Fear = To what extent does the thought of nuclear war frighten you? USArm = To what extent is the U.S. sufficiently armed with nuclear weapons? USSRArm = To what extent is the U.S.S.R. sufficiently armed with nuclear weapons? OtherArm = To what extent is the rest of the world (excluding the U.S. and U.S.S.R.) sufficiently armed with nuclear weapons? Viewer n = 45. Nonviewer n = 10.